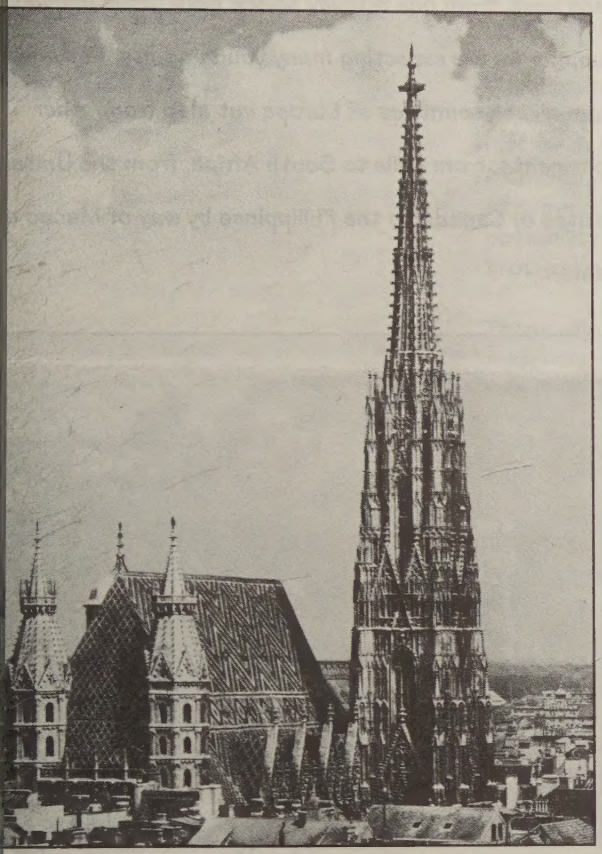
Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF 3 June – July 1997



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During World Youth Day in Paris

From August 19 to 22, times of prayer and sharing led by Taizé brothers in the church of Saint Sulpice

Thursday evening 21 August, at 8:30 pm, common prayer and meditation by Brother Roger in the church of Saint Sulpice

From Tuesday 19 to Friday 22 August, before the Saturday and Sunday meetings with Pope John Paul II, brothers of Taizé will lead times of common prayer in the church of Saint Sulpice, in the centre of Paris (metro: Saint-Sulpice).

In addition to these times of prayer, there will be times of sharing with young people from around the world on the theme of reconciliation, or the possibility of silent prayer in the church.

Times of common prayer:
Tuesday 19 August: 12:30 pm and 8:30 pm
Wednesday 20 August: 3 pm and 6 pm
Thursday 21 August: 8:30 pm,
with a meditation by Brother Roger
Friday 22 August: 5 pm

Times of sharing or silent prayer:
Tuesday 19 August: from 10 am to 12:30 pm
and from 1:30 pm to 4 pm
Wednesday 20 August: from 2 pm to 3 pm
and from 4 pm to 6 pm.
Friday 22 August: from 2 pm to 5 pm,
with silent prayer around the cross.

Taizé
EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG ADULT
Vienna
29 December '97/98
- 2 January

YOUNG ADULT EUROPEAN MEETING IN VIENNA

A Tradition of Hospitality

The next young adult European meeting will take place in Vienna, Austria, from 29 December 1997 to 2 January 1998. Five years have passed since the last European meeting in the Austrian capital. But the memories remain alive in the families and parishes that welcomed participants from throughout Europe.

In the letter he wrote recently to the parishes of the archdiocese of Vienna to inform them of preparations for the upcoming meeting, Archbishop Christoph Schönborn reminded them that, during the previous meeting, "the parishes had a very positive experience as a result of the contact with young adults from the different countries of Europe, the common prayer and the openness to one another."

Many remember that the parishes did all they could to welcome the extremely large number of participants. At the same time, these parishes had already given proof of a generous hospitality by offering accommodations often to several Bosnian and Croatian families.

This spirit of hospitality and attention to foreigners is a very strong aspect of the life of Viennese Christians. A young man from that city recently wrote:

"I think it is important that we not

just wait for others to take the initiative for the Church to change and come closer to people. We have to begin ourselves and be ready to go towards those who need help. A few months ago, we welcomed a woman and her nephew who were homeless. We fixed up the room where the youth group meets for them to stay, until they can find a real place to live. It was Christmastime, and so we prepared a celebration for them. Then the parish also looked for ways of helping them, and when they were given a flat by the city, members of the parish brought furniture. This spirit of hospitality becomes visible again and again, and young people take turns on Sunday to drive elderly people back and forth to church."

The experience of five years ago guarantees that the upcoming meeting will be very well received. Vienna is a city with a tradition of hospitality. At the time, a journalist wrote:

"The young Europeans were a gift for the city. First of all because they gave the lie to all the clichés about young people... And also because they were able to undertake what had previously seemed impossible to many Viennese: they caused much of the usual mistrust with regard to foreigners to fall away; they stimulated people who thought they were unable to show hospitality. Families, parishes, youth associations and communities offered accommodations; thousands of citizens helped to feed and transport the participants... The city authorities were able to deal with the challenges of organizing such an event. Countless people lent a hand, even if only to help one young person to find his way."

Another Viennese journalist described the joyful presence of the young with much sympathy:

"Upon their arrival, the young Europeans had no particular sign that set them apart, except a map of the city in their hand to find the place they were staying, and obvious good humour. The streets of the city centre were filled with a sea of girls and boys from every country, looking for their way and yet calm, coming and going without disturbing anyone. All had in common a contagious smile. Our city, which is said to be too old, has shown at the end of this year a young face."

N.B. The dates of this year's European meeting have been shifted one day compared to previous years: it will take place from Monday, 29 December 1997 to Friday, 2 January 1998.

Taizé

More than at other times of the year, summer in Taizé is a time of world-wide openness and an opportunity to deepen one's prayer and reflection. Meetings are held each week, from one Sunday to the next. This coming summer we are expecting many young adults, not only from all the countries of Europe but also from other continents, from Chile to South Africa, from the United States or Canada to the Philippines by way of Macao or Taiwan.

From an age-old prayer to the Holy Spirit

Come, true light. Come, eternal life. Come, you whom my poor soul has desired and still desires. Come, you who have become yourself desire in me, you who made me desire you. Come, my breath and my life. Come, comfort of my poor soul. Come, my joy, my glory, my endless happiness.

I thank you for having become one spirit with me. I thank you for having become for me light with no declining, sun that never sets. [...] You do not turn away from a single being, you never reject a single one. So come, O Lord, pitch your tent in me today; make your dwelling there and live continually, inseparably, until the end, in me, your servant.

Saint Symeon, called the New Theologian, tenth-eleventh century

Each Week Young Adult Meetings in Taizé

When someone arrives in Taizé, they can choose one of several different ways to spend the week:

The group on "the wellsprings of the faith." "After a few days," writes Michael, who brought a group to Taizé at Easter, "I saw more clearly the importance of the meetings and the reflection proposed in the group on the wellsprings of the faith. The young people I came with entered easily into the common prayer, even if it was very new for them. They needed more time, though, to make the effort to be open to others in the groups and to try and understand them, but the Bible themes developped were a good complement to the discoveries in the prayer. This week gave them a basis for continuing to reflect on what is essential when they return home."

For those who wish, the "Bible group" provides a possibility to read and study more intensely some basic Bible texts, as a way of gaining a deeper comprehension of the faith and of Christian life.

Workshops led by brothers of the community will deal with selected topics, such as "The life of communion of the early Christians and the Church," "How can we understand that God speaks to us? How can we read the Bible?" and "Dare to say a yes for life to follow Christ."

Many young adults are happy to spend a week in silence to go further in a personal relationship with God, sustained by the times of common prayer and the possibility of speaking with a brother or a sister.

Those who can play a musical instrument and bring it with them can take part in a workshop on "How to use instruments to support singing in our prayer groups and parishes?" Some of the musicians will be invited to accompany the singing in the church on Saturday and Sunday (only wind instruments, cello, classical guitar; a very high level of proficiency is necessary to play in the church).

Those who have already come to Taizé can help out by spending several weeks in Taizé during the summer. In this case they are offered a special programme, and given responsibilities to welcome others. They can be welcomed free of charge if necessary beginning on the second or third week. They should write ahead for information.

For other information, write to
Meetings
Taizé Community
71250 Taizé, France.
Tel. (33) 385 50 30 02 (from 10 am to 12 noon and from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm French time)
Fax (33) 385 50 30 16
Community phone (33) 385 50 30 30
Email: meetings@taize.fr
Web page: http://www.taize.fr

REGISTRATION FORM

to be sent to: Meetings, TAIZÉ -COMMUNITY, 71250 TAIZÉ, France. Tel: (+33) 385 50 30 02, Fax (+33) 385 50 30 16

First Name

Family Name

Address

County or City & State Post code

Telephone : .....

Occupation : ..... Age: .....

✘ I wish to participate in the meetings from ..... to .....

(Please circle "yes" or "no")

✘ Will bring my own tent : yes / no

✘ Means of transport: Skyline Coaches other coach minibus car train other : .....

✘ For the disabled, adult group-leaders, those who cannot sleep on the floor, please fill in the following:

✘ I need a bed yes/no. If "yes" please circle below who you are: woman / man couple / family with ..... children (age of the children : .....) disabled person / helper of disabled person

✘ I receive the Letter of Taizé : yes / no

✘ I have already been to Taizé : yes / no (last stay : month ..... year .....)

Two Questions Concerning the Holy Spirit

What does it change to receive the Holy Spirit?

A great theologian of the first millenium wrote: "The Holy Spirit is not absent from any creature" (Maximus Confessor). The creator Spirit is the breath of God at the origin of every life. Still more: every instant of a life is penetrated, and even made possible, by the Spirit of God. It is the continual gift of his breath (or of his Spirit; the biblical languages do not know the difference) that separates creatures from nothingness (Psalm 104,29-30). A first answer to the question is that the Holy Spirit transforms us into living beings. Receiving the Spirit means welcoming the gift of life.

But there is more. Risen from the dead, Jesus breathed upon his disciples and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20,22). Before his death, he promised them that they would never be alone. Especially in difficult and threatening situations, they would not need to worry, for, said Jesus, "it will not be you speaking, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13,11). The Holy Spirit will be for them "another advocate, supporter, comforter" (John 14,16: all these translations are possible). Another comforter, meaning that the Holy Spirit reassures and supports us. He awakens our confidence just as Jesus did for those who came to him while he lived on earth. Receiving the Holy Spirit means benefitting from everything Jesus was for his disciples while he was with them in this world. Thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit we can say: "For us today, Christ Jesus is still what he was for his disciples when he lived on earth" (*Choose to Love*, Brother Roger's letter for 1996).

We can be sure that the Holy Spirit, life and desire for happiness, has always been present in every human being. What change then comes to us through Christ, through faith and baptism, prayer and the love that unites us to him? In the life of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is above all trust and intimacy with God, his Father. When we receive the Spirit from Christ, we become members of God's family with him, and God is for us the Father who is always there, who looks at us, listens to us, supports us (see Romans 8,14-17; Galatians 4,6-7).

Can we feel the presence of the Holy Spirit?

The apostle John reflected on the question: how can we be sure of God's presence in our life? To answer, he does not draw our attention to extraordinary experiences but rather reflects on the ordinary, everyday life of believers. Whoever trusts in Christ, whoever loves and says it by his life, "remains in God and God remains in him" (see 1 John 3,18-24). By a humble practice, "loving in acts and in truth," we can be sure we are in communion with God and with Christ.

But John adds these surprising words to this concrete response: "This is how we know that God remains in us: by the Spirit he has given us" (1 John 3,24). Whereas we sometimes look for feelings or experiences to convince us that the Holy Spirit is really there, John sees things in exactly the opposite way. For him, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the only thing that is truly certain.

The Holy Spirit is "given." It is something like speaking of the "givens" when we have to solve a certain problem or deal with a certain project. Everything can be problematic, except for the "givens" that are not called into question. In the same way, our experiences of faith, prayer and love are never completely clear. They reassure us. But at the same time, they involve an element of ambiguity, incertainty and even confusion that can even disconcert us or awaken a doubt. Then the Holy Spirit, whom God has given us and who will never leave us, becomes in us the certainty that our prayer, our intentions, our feelings and our acts, even when they are hesitant or confused, are already entirely inhabited, transformed and sanctified by God.

We should not try too hard to feel the Holy Spirit, for he is much more than the realities we can feel: "The Spirit is our life" (Galatians 5,25). But we should not hesitate to taste his fruit and find our happiness in what he produces in us and in others: love, joy, peace, patience and kindness and many other things too (see Galatians 5,22-23).

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JULY

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

1 Jn 1:5-7
1 Tue If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we are in communion with one another.

2 Co 1:18-22
2 Wed Christ Jesus was never Yes-and-No; his nature is all Yes. For in him is found the Yes to all God's promises.

Jn 20:24-29
3 Thu St THOMAS
Risen from the dead, Jesus said to Thomas who doubted, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Rv 2:8-11
4 Fri The Lord says: I know your trials and your poverty, yet you are rich: do not fear suffering, stay faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life.

Col 2:6-13
5 Sat Live your lives in Christ Jesus. Be rooted and built up in him, strengthened by the faith you have been taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

2 Co 12:1-10
6 SUN Paul writes: God said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Dt 30:11-14
7 Mon Moses told the people: What I command you today is not too difficult for you nor beyond your reach. The Word is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart for you to put it into practice.

Lk 6:36-38
8 Tue Jesus said: Give, and it will be given to you. A full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure used for you.

Rm 8:31-39
9 Wed St. Paul writes: I am certain of this: neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Rm 14:13-19
10 Thu St. Paul writes: The kingdom of God is not a question of exterior rules, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Mt 6:7-15
11 Fri Jesus said: Some think that by using many words in their prayer, they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Is 6:1-8
12 Sat In a vision, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord say, "Whom shall I send?" And he answered, "Here I am, send me."

Mk 6:7-13
13 SUN Calling the Twelve to him, Jesus sent them out two by two. And they went preaching the need to change one's heart and they drove out many evil spirits.

2 P 1:5-8
14 Mon Seek perseverance, true devotion, mutual kindness and love. If you live with these things, they will bring you to a real knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mk 11:22-25
15 Tue Jesus said: When you pray, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, as your Father in heaven forgives your sins.

2 Co 5:18-21
16 Wed In Christ, God has reconciled us to himself and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation.

Rv 3:20-22
17 Thu The Risen Christ says: I stand at the door, knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.

1 S 16:1-13
18 Fri The Lord said to Samuel: Take no notice of his appearance. God does not see as human beings see: they look at the appearance but God looks at the heart.

Lk 22:24-27
19 Sat Jesus said to his disciples: Who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet I am among you as one who serves.

Mk 6:30-34
20 SUN When Jesus saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them at length.

Pr 3:3-6
21 Mon Trust in God with all your heart and do not rely upon your own understanding.

Jr 2:1-13
22 Tue The Lord said of his people: They have forsaken me, the fount of living water, and have dug themselves cracked cisterns that will not hold water.

Dt 31:1-8
23 Wed The Lord your God walks with you. God will never leave you or forsake you.

1 Jn 4:12-21
24 Thu Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother or sister they see cannot love God whom they do not see.

Mt 20:20-28
25 Fri St JAMES
Having called his disciples together, Jesus said: You know that in the world the powerful make their power felt. Among you this is not to happen. No, anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant.

Rv 3:7-8
26 Sat Thus says the Lord: Though you are not very strong, you have kept my Word, and now I have opened before you a door that no one can close.

Jn 6:1-15
27 SUN After the people saw the miraculous sign worked by Jesus, they began to say: "Surely this is the prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, realizing that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, withdrew to the hills again, alone.

Rm 12:3-13
28 Mon Paul writes: When you give, give generously, from the heart; when you do works of mercy, do so with joy.

Si 2:1-11
29 Tue If you want to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for trials. Be sincere of heart and steadfast. Do not be alarmed by adversity, but attach yourself to the Lord and do not leave him.

Mi 6:6-8
30 Wed This is what the Lord wants of you, only this: to act justly, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.

1 Co 13:8-13
31 Thu Paul writes: These three things remain: Faith, hope and love. And the greatest of them is love.

JOHANNINE HOURS

PSALM 8

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

A hymn of wonder and praise, Psalm 8 celebrates the God who is revealed in the realities of creation. The author describes God as a majestic king who fashions the universe in a struggle against the powers of chaos (v.1-2). Then, contemplating the wonders of the world set in place by God, his thoughts turn towards human beings, whose smallness is in striking contrast with the immensity that surrounds them.

At this point, the psalmist experiences a radical change of perspectives. No, these beings apparently so frail and vulnerable are in fact the cornerstone of creation. God made them to share in his kingship, so that they can help all created beings to live in harmony. The verb "to give dominion" (v.6) does not refer here to oppression or exploitation; it describes the calling of a king, who must ensure the rule of justice in the land and be a source of blessing for his subjects (cf. Ps 72). The vocation of human beings, the "viceroys" of creation, is thus to enable the entire universe to be a faithful reflection of God's glory. It is therefore appropriate that the Letter to the Hebrews applies this psalm to Christ (Heb 2,5-9): through the "becoming less" of his Son, God reveals and communicates his radiant Love at the heart of the world. The "subjection" of all things to the Son (cf. 1 Cor 15,20-25; Eph 1,22-23) has a single purpose: liberated from the forces of destruction, the universe is henceforth able to receive the fullness of life through him.

- How do we discover God's presence in the world?
- Through what lifestyle and what actions can we live out our calling to be caretakers of the created world in the image of God?
- How does Christ show us the true vocation of a human being?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

AUGUST

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

Mt 20:24-28

1 Fri Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the forgiveness of many.

Jn 4:5-42

2 Sat Jesus said: Anyone who drinks the water I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give them will become a spring of water within them, welling up to eternal life.

Jn 6:27-29

3 SUN The people asked Jesus, "What must we do to do God's work?" Jesus replied, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Lk 5:29-32

4 Mon Jesus said: It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Mk 1:1-15

5 Tue Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

Mk 9:2-10

6 Wed TRANSFIGURATION Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

Dt 15:7-11

7 Thu Be open-handed towards your neighbour and towards the poor and needy in your land.

Mt 18:1-4

8 Fri Jesus said: Truly, I tell you, the one who becomes as little as a little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

2 Co 5:1-7

9 Sat We advance by faith, not by sight.

Jn 6:41-51

10 SUN Jesus said: No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day.

Lk 6:27-35

11 Mon Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.

Mt 6:25-34

12 Tue Jesus said: Do not be anxious about your life... Your Father in heaven knows what you need. Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself.

Si 2:1-9

13 Wed You who revere the Lord, wait for his mercy. Do not turn aside from him.

Ph 1:3-11

14 Thu I am confident that the One who began a good work in you will go on completing it until the day of Christ Jesus comes.

Lk 1:39-56

15 Fri THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who revere him.

2 Co 4:7-12

16 Sat We carry the treasure of God's glory in earthen vessels so that it may be quite clear that the radiance comes from God, not from us.

Jn 6:47-51

17 SUN Jesus said: I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.

Is 30:15

18 Mon The Lord says: Your salvation is in returning and rest, your strength lies in calm and trust.

Ep 4:1-7

19 Tue With all humility, gentleness and patience, bear with one another in love. Take every care to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace.

Is 58:7-10

20 Wed If you do away with the accusing finger and malicious talk, if you give what is yours for the hungry, then your light will rise in the darkness and your darkest hour will be like the middle of the day.

Mt 7:7-11

21 Thu Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Mt 11:28-30

22 Fri Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

Ep 2:13-18

23 Sat Christ is our peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between the peoples and reconciled them to God, through the cross. In his own person, he has destroyed hatred.

Jn 6:67-69

24 SUN Seeing that many of his disciples were turning away, Jesus said to the Twelve, "What about you, do you want to go away too?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Ba 5:1-9

25 Mon Leave behind your sadness and put on for ever the beauty of God's glory. For the Lord will guide you in joy, with the mercy and saving justice that come from him.

1 P 1:3-9

26 Tue Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. Still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious it cannot be described.

Lk 6:36-38

27 Wed Jesus said: Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged.

Ep 4:17-32

28 Thu Let yourselves be made new in the attitude of your minds to be clothed with the new self, which is created to be like God in justice and in holiness of the truth.

Jn 10:1-10

29 Fri Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Is 42:10-17

30 Sat The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.

Jm 1:17-27

31 SUN Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.

JOHANNINE HOURS

MATTHEW 20,1-1

Johannine hours are meant as a way seeking God in silence and prayer in t midst of our daily life. During t course of a day, take an hour or so read the Bible passage with the sho commentary and to reflect on the que tions which follow. Afterwards, a gro of 3 to 10 people can meet to share wh they have discovered and perhaps for time of prayer.

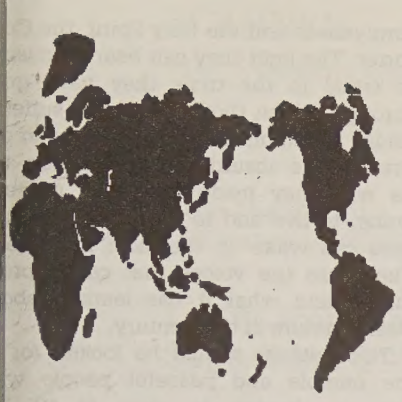
John, known as Chrysostom "golden mouth," lived for a fe years as a hermit before becomin a priest, then bishop of Constant nople, at the end of the fourth cen tury. In a meditation for the feas of Easter, he invites everyone t be joyful, taking up the Gospe parable:

Let those who live their faith those who love the Lord, come t taste the enchantment of thi feast! Let the faithful servant enter, full of gladness, into the master's joy. Let those who hav borne the weight of fasting com and receive their salary.

Those who began their work a the first hour will receive their jus wages today; those who came a the third hour will rejoice wit thanksgiving; those who will onl arrive at the sixth hour can ap proach without fear, they will no be deprived; if some have lingere until the ninth hour, they can com without hesitation; the workers c the eleventh hour will not suffer fo their delay.

For the Lord is generous: he re ceives the last just as the first; h grants rest to the workers of th eleventh hour just as to those wh began their work at dawn. H shows mercy to the last and fill the first; he gives to the forme without forgetting the latter; h does not only consider the work but already grasps the intention. Let no one lament their poverty the Kingdom is open to all; let n one weep over their sins: forgive ness has risen from the tomb; le no one fear death: the Lord's deat has freed us; he brought dow death when it kept him in chains.

- How can we too enter into tha joy, and realize that nothing i our life is excluded from the jo of the Resurrection?
- In what situations do I need t remember this forgiveness an this liberation?



Listening to the continents

Myanmar

Places of Compassion

A short time ago, meetings for young dults were held in Myanmar, simple ex-ressions of the "pilgrimage of trust on arth."

Young animators from different par-hes and dioceses travelled for many ours, sometimes a whole night, in parish eeps piled high with sacks of rice and ther items for the meals during the neeting. The group from Mawlamyine ook two whole days to reach the youth entre set in the middle of the paddy elds which was the venue for the meet-ng. The rainy season had made some oads impassable, so some people had no noice but to make the journey by boat.

oon the simple building of the centre as transformed into a place of waiting n Christ. The young people arrived si-ently in the chapel from six in the morn-g. Little by little the singing got under-ay. Taizé songs, translated into the ocal language, alternated with songs om Myanmar. Many people found that ne meeting was an opportunity to dis-over a taste for sharing around a reading om the Bible. On the final day, everyone et off on pilgrimage, through the rice elds, to Thairphyu, where a much vener-ted missionary had lived and is now bur-d. Although there was no rain that day, ne mud was so thick that everybody had walk barefoot to a beautiful wooden nurch. The village families had prepared feast, and some of the young people ad come early to make sure that every-ing was ready.

Children were very present during these days, especially by their singing. The places where the meetings were held are places where real compassion exists, where much is being done for the children. Each parish has a house where they welcome children who are either orphans or else whose parents are unable to look after them. Some have lost parents through malaria, but some of the fathers have died in clashes. For others, there is no school in the village, or else there is a school but no teachers. The houses set up by the parishes are deliberately kept small so that they may have a family atmosphere. Some of them are led by catechists and their wives, others by one of the "zatamans", young volunteers who give two years of their life for some kind of service in the Church. The children go off to school in the morning and come back to the house in the evening. Each parish tries to be financially self-sufficient. Each house has a piece of land where they can cultivate vegetables. There is a little poultry, and recently they have started having fishponds. In the Bishop's House, there is even a workshop for making soap! The workshop can serve the needs of the hundreds of children living in the houses. Another workshop makes candles, since there is no electricity anywhere.

What is the secret behind all this? Could it perhaps be the fact that a Church community with very few material means, very often limited in its action and sometimes with insuperable obstacles, yet day after day giving itself without counting in order to respond to the needs of the people, such a community becomes so attractive that it transmits something irreplaceable of the Gospel?

India

Towards the "Brightness of a Communion" in Assam

Pilgrimage of trust meetings resemble one another–they have so much in common–and, apart from words like "prayer", "sharing" and "commitment", it is hard to describe them. Yet each gathering is unique and that stood out very clearly at the February 1997 meeting at Barpeta Road, a mission station in the Archdiocese of Guwahati, in North-East India.

This region of the state of Assam has been experiencing outbreaks of violence for the last year. First of all, it was confrontation between two tribes, the Boros and the Santals, which left thousands of refugees without shelter during the rainy season. At the end of 1996, when people believed that the conflicts were dying down and the refugees were gradually returning to their villages, a bomb exploded in a main-line train between Delhi and Guwahati, leaving several hundred dead. This time, the tension was between two factions of the same tribe, one very radical, the other more moderate.

It was in these circumstances that the "pilgrimage of trust" came to Assam and truly did become a "pilgrimage for peace". Barpeta Road Parish had been chosen to welcome the participants from many places. Situated on the main road, it is in the centre of the diocese. Young volunteers had been making visits ahead of time to youth groups in the parishes to help them prepare for the event. One of the consequences of this in-depth preparation was the way people took part so fully. At Barpeta Road, everybody helped. Young men and women from the local hostels, the parish members, even some of the children from the "boardings", some of whom were from the refugee camps. A pandal (a temporary bamboo structure covered with leaves) set up for the event provided ample space for meeting and the flags festooned everywhere gave the entire compound a festive atmosphere.

The young people belonged to different ethnic communities, some of whom were still very tense, and even violent. It was almost a miracle to see them pray, share and eat together. Everything was simultaneously translated into five languages : Hindi, Assamese, Boro, Garo and English.

The first day, the discussion groups started off very slowly and the facilitators were almost discouraged. Such was the diversity that some of the participants did not speak any of the five languages! But little by little contact was established and the desire to communicate and to share took over, to the point that on the final day they could hardly bear to leave one another! The theme "from doubt to the brightness of a communion", from the Letter for 1997 was full of significance for everybody. There are so many reasons to doubt and there is so much "darkness" for these young people. In addition to the ethnic conflicts there are difficulties in finding work, with all the frustrations that implies, including drugs and alcohol.

Each afternoon, a "forum" helped to create communion: the groups from various parishes could present activities from their parishes but also from the culture of their community. It was incredible to see how in one single diocese there could exist such a variety of cultures: costume, language, dances, customs. The circle was widened by the presence of young people from other regions of India.

The bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church came for two days with a group from his diocese, re-enforcing the links made through months of working together in refugee relief. He reminded everyone of how necessary it is to commit ourselves and to look reality in the face. The Catholic Archbishop of Guwahati tackled the question of money, asking: "How can I have a healthy attitude towards money?". Another central theme

Listening to the continents

presented for reflection was that of violence.

At the centre of these days the three times of prayer in the church, and especially the prayer around the cross and the celebration of light, brought a real note of hope. It was joy that was visible on people's faces as each one set off on the way home.

Russia

Preparing Ways of Communion with Christians

Observers who arrive in Russia are always taken aback at the contradictions. In the realm of economics, for example. In the past few years great fortunes have been made, and yet the poverty is more striking than ever. The underground trains sport brightly coloured advertisements, and yet now there are beggars, too. And you see many housewives standing outside the railway stations to sell small objects.

Another contradiction is linked to the reawakening, in part of the population, of the feeling of being threatened by foreigners. This causes a reflex of withdrawal inwards, at the same time as the burgeoning trade, new possibilities to travel abroad, and the growth of the media allow an openness that the society had never before known.

The Church also is affected by the different social currents. The religious revival of the early 1990s is over, but renewal continues. In 1988 there were forty churches open for worship in Moscow; today there are over 450 parishes served by more than 450 priests and 163 deacons.

Church buildings are being restored, iconostases reguilded, frescoes repainted, spiritual and theological works reprinted. Sunday schools are being organized, and many theological institutes are offering courses. Material needs are great everywhere in order to complete the work that has been undertaken.

In the last few years, the majority of Russians have received baptism. Although the Church is aware that it is only a small minority, there is a real dynamism in the parishes. Each one resembles a home. Around the priests, the choir and those who help with the liturgy, there is a whole group of people who work for the upkeep of the church, who sell things or do the cooking. There is an even greater number of persons who generously offer their help to teach catechism, to offer solidarity in different groups. Many are newly baptized Christians, who grew up in an atheistic land and in a secularized society.

Beneath the hieratic appearance of the liturgy, the living springs of the Gospel well up. For example during the celebration of Forgiveness Sunday, at the beginning of Lent: after a service of litanies and prayers, the priest gives a long sermon about sin. Then, all at once, still dressed in his magnificent vestments, he falls down on his knees, bows his head to the ground, and cries out, "In God's name forgive me; I am a sinner!" The faithful reply, "God forgives you, and forgive us sinners!" Then each of the faithful comes up personally to make the same request to the line of priests and their assistants, while the choir sings hymns, one after another. This dialogue will be repeated between all the members of the assembly and later on, in people's homes, in families.

We can appreciate the Orthodox Christians' love of the liturgy, placed at the centre of their Christian life. Many acquired a deep awareness of the Church at a time which experienced just as much persecution as during the first Christian centuries. They have a strong sense of spiritual filiation.

Attempting to support the hope of a coming together between the Christians of the East and of the West requires us to nip in the bud the prejudices and misunderstandings that foster mistrust. This is possible through an attitude of dispassionate listening and by matching one's step to the other's pace in order to walk forward together.

If all we offer is aid or we are simply taken aback by the size of the problems, that will only reinforce the Russians in their discouragement. Their silent expectation is to find people who believe in them. This can enable them to take up the true challenge, which is to open a new way forward today. The only way to achieve this is for us to simplify our lives to the point of witnessing that we too have no other support for our life than forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, the Co forter. The light they can bear witness is equal to the trials they have go through. When those who have suffer under incredible constraints, gone to t brink of the absurdity of destruction, t us why they made the effort to ke going, to live and to give life, their w ness can wake up the most indifferen These are the voices that can expre Russia and what it has learned abo human nature in this century.

This witness should be looked for the humble and peaceful people w keep on hoping in spite of all t prophets of doom. In those who do n transmit fear, those who are free, for th have nothing to lose and no career view: the grandmother who raises h grandson alone. Those who hold out th hand to beggars and who let the hom less come in and eat the leftovers on the customers have left. Those who kno the value of the weakest, the mo ravaged beings, and who do all they c to welcome the mentally handicapp and street children, to visit the sick a imprisoned. Those former dissidents w start a school and become teachers b cause "to rebuild, you have to start fro the bottom through education." Thos who, leaving the security of a universi career, commit their lives to rebuild pa ish communities. Those who can read, a child's face, the joyful innocence a who know that the simple happiness of child can touch the most distant beings.

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